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AUTHOR Razza, Carol
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ABSTRACT

This practicum was designed to increase parent awareness of the importance of family play interaction and to foster parents' ability to demonstrate these playskills as a couple and within the family. Questionnaires and personal interviews confirmed the need for more information on the importance of play and of age-appropriate play skills. A workshop was developed to enable parents to accomplish four goals: (1) to recognize their misunderstandings about play; (2) to teach the importance of both couple and family play; (3) to help participants understand the reasons for their lack of playful behavior; and (4) to inform parents about age-appropriate play. Small and large group sharing, personal family interviews, and literature dissemination were also used to assure a complete knowledge base. Analysis of the data gathered and observation of the families indicated that the parents increased in both knowledge and demonstration. There was an increase of two or more points on all playfulness questions, indicating an overall better understanding of the benefits of playful behavior in the family. Communication with families proved to be a positive factor in increasing family cohesiveness. Four appendices contain survey instruments and an observational checklist. (Author/KW)

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ED 387 728

Improving, Through Participation in Workshops, Parents Demonstration of Play-Skills Within the Family

by

Carol Razza

Cluster 60

A practicum 1 report Presented to the Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Education

Nova Southeastern University

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APPROVAL PAGE

This practicum took place as described.

W J Dockerill

Verifier: Fr. Walter Dockerill

Pastor St. Rita Church
Title

13645 Paddock Drive Wellington Florida 33414
Address

July 5, 1995
Date

This practicum report was submitted by Carol Razza under the direction of the adviser listed below. It was submitted to the Ed. D. Program in Child and Youth Studies and approved in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education at Nova Southeastern University.

Approved:

February 9, 1995
Date of Final Approval of Report

B Mathews Hill
B. Mathews Hill, Advisor

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT----------ii

TABLE OF CONTENTS ----------iii

Chapter

I INTRODUCTION---------- 1

Description of Community---------- 1
Writer's Work Setting and Role---------- 1

II STUDY OF PROBLEM ---------- 4

Problem Description---------- 4
Problem Documentation---------- 5
Causative Analysis ---------- 8
Relationship of the Problem to the Literature ----------10

III ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS ----------15

Goals and Expectations ----------15
Expected Outcomes ----------15
Measurement of Outcomes ----------16

IV SOLUTION STRATEGY ----------18

Discussion and Evaluation of Solutions ----------18
Description of Selected Solution ----------22
Report of Action Taken ----------25

V RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATION --28

Results----------28
Discussion 28
Recommendations ----------30
Dissemination----------30

REFERENCES ----------31

Appendices

A PERSONAL REPORT PLAY-SKILL QUESTIONNAIRE 34
B OBSERVATIONAL CHECKLIST ----------35

C PERSONAL REPORT RATING SCALE----------36
D PLAY-QUESTIONAIRE ----------37

ABSTRACT

Improving, Through Participation in Workshops, Parents Demonstration of Play-Skills within the Family. Razza, Carol, 1995: Practicum Report, Nova Southeastern University, Ed.D. Program in Child and Youth Studies.

This practicum was designed to increase parent awareness of the importance of family play interaction and to foster parents ability to demonstrate these playskills, as a couple and , within the family. Questionnaires and personal interviews confirmed the need for more information on the importance of play, and of age appropriate play-skills.

The writer developed a workshop that would enable parents to (1) recognize their misunderstandings about play, (2) teach the importance of both couple and family play, (3) help participants to understand the reasons for their lack of playful behavior, and (4) to inform parents about age appropriate play. Small and large group sharing, personal family interviews, and literature dissemination were other strategies used to assure a complete knowledge base.

Analysis of the data and observation by the program coordinator indicated that the parents increased in both knowledge and demonstration. There was an increase of two points or better on all playfulness questions, indicating an overall better understanding of the benefits of playful behavior in the family. Communication with families proved positive to the increase in family cohesiveness.

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INTRODUCTION

Description of the Community

The community that surrounds the writers work setting reflects middle income America. The socio-economic status is comprised of both lower and upper middle class families . This community also houses a wealthy seasonal population. The average age group that is represented extends from the mid to upper thirties to the mid to upper forties. This age median also extends through all of the socio-economic groups mentioned. Although, most of the community is comprised of families consisting of both parents, single parents and dual income no children families are also included in the population structure. The community doesn't lack children, two elementary schools, one junior and one senior high school are filled to capacity. Children are an obvious priority as recognized in its extensive sports program and very busy girls and boys club. There are parks and playgrounds throughout with ballfields and tennis courts enmeshed within a peaceful environment. This describes the community that surrounds the writer's work setting, which is a private psychotherapy practice with patients drawn from this general population.

Writer's Work Setting and Role

There are various aspects of the population that are involved directly in the writer's work setting. Although life seems quiet and

health counseling and has been in practice for twelve years. The writer is an adjunct professor at a local community college and teaches in the areas of counseling, as well as, marriage and family. The writer presents a program called Children First . This program aids divorcing parents of minor age children to effectively handle their children and help them thrcugh this sometimes traumatic time in their life. The writer founded a program called, I Love My Baby. This program aids pregnant teens and teen parents. In 1985 an offshoot of I Love My Baby was born, Pilgrimage, an aftercare facility for teen mothers and their babies, housed, educated, and nurtured that population of individuals that needed guidance and love. The writer has remained actively involved in youth programs at the junior and senior high school level for fifteen years. This writer is dedicated to making a difference in the community and, therefore, continues to research, learn and discover new ways to help the general population grow in their family relationships.

STUDY OF THE PROBLEM

Problem Description

Research supports the necessity for family play and playfulness, however, reality indicates and society is designed, so as to, disallow the importance of family interaction through play. Many families today do not enjoy one another in a carefree manor nor do they experience the relationship of the family from a perspective other than that of the daily required responsibilities. Individuals, couples, and families must relearn or for many, learn for the first time, how to play.

The families that were indicated in this report, were primarily comprised of dual income parents. In some cases two incomes were essential for the support of the family, however, in most , two incomes had become a way of life, that seemed impossible to change. The pressure in today's society to succeed financially had become the driving force in many families . Parents found it difficult to see the long-term benefits in play interaction with their children, because, financial stability

seemed to take precedence. Although, financial stability is certainly a goal to be achieved, there needed tobe a sense of balance. Unfortunately, one area of family life needing priority attention was not seen as a necessity at all, that area being family play. The problem, as seen, in the population presented in this report, was that parents tend to demonstrate ineffective play skills.

Problem Documentation

The evidence of the problem became clear through a series of personal family interviews. Parents repeatedly indicated either a lack of desire, concern, or understanding about play. Their notion about the unimportance of play was expressed in a number of ways and supported by their lack of understanding of the benefits. The parents in one family, that had completely broken down internally, expressed a need to have their two children, ages ten and seven years, come to an understanding of the families problems concerning finances. They reported this need through a family interview and indicated their lack of play when completing the The Personal Report Play-Skill Questionnaire (see Appendix A). On more than one occasion either or both parents would state their fact that " the kids just have to understand that we are finding it difficult financially" . When play was expressed as, not only an outlet to mend the internal breakdown, but to also relieve stress, the response clearly indicated a lack of understanding about the benefits of play. Many parents interviewed felt that children played enough during and after

school and that peer interaction was the only play they needed. A large amount of the population interviewed expressed their exhaustion after working all day as the main reason for a lack of play in their homes. The reasons for a lack of play interaction in families, were many, and were witnessed, in personal interviews, in observation of family interactions, and as indicated in a summary of the Personal Report Play-Skill Questionnaire (see Appendix A).

The families indicated in this population were observed in a number of environments, those being, therapy, social environments, as well as, those activities surrounding church and sports. Family interaction, for the most part, had been observed as being very mechanical, role oriented, not spontaneous, and usually activities were designed to meet the parents needs rather than the needs of the children.

One highly competitive family, consisting of both biological parents and three teenage boys, sought counseling because of a high level of verbal and, on one or more occasions physical fighting. When asked about their play behavior dad very proudly proclaimed the importance of play and how the scales were probably unbalanced in their family, with too much family play. After a period of raised eyes and disgust from other family members, the truth came out, there were a misunderstandings, on dads part about the dynamics of family play. Competitive sports had become a substitute, in many families for play interaction, and so it was in this family . Sports had become the focus of the family. The boys would spend hour upon hour practicing their tennis moves, so as to be

perfect for dad. Because of their desire to please him they continued this behavior, with only slight rebellion. However, as they approached adolescence their anger intensified. Mom. who recognized the problem early on, was no competition for dads power, so instead, decided to remove herself from witnessing the anguish of the competition. Dad, doing what he did and enjoyed best, went unchallenged until it was to late. Unfortunately this family remains estranged and probably will until the boys are able to recognize dads lack of understanding, not lack of love. Parents, to often, misinterpreted the experience of family play, and instead substituted organized sports, that although, were very important, should have been placed in balance.

Many families were designed to meet the needs of the adults rather than the children. In many cases vacations were planned by adults for adults and the children "should " have had a good time. Family activities were adult oriented, and became frustrating for children. Further observation of family interactions supported the notion that families in that population lacked spontaneity. Parents had difficulty changing their routines and very often children were entertained by television sets rather than healthy play activity with other family members.

The observational checklist (see summary Appendix B) also revealed correlations in many areas that supported the evidence of the problem. In many of the families observed, parents and children seemed uneasy with family play, parents found it difficult to relax and to give up their parental role in play. Many parents shared a lack of knowledge in

age appropriate play and creative play activities. Also, children who were not accustom to family play seemed uncomfortable with parental play interaction. Evidence continued to prove the lack of family play interaction in that population .

Causative Analysis

The causes for the problem were many, however, the population of families in that environment were confined to four specific areas. The problems all stemmed from the parents ineffectiveness, not the children's lack of desire.

The first and probably greatest cause for their lack of play was that parents were not raised in playful environments as children, therefore, they were not equipped to create a playful environment for their children. As individuals grow through the stages of infancy to adulthood there personality evolves such that, very often, a major part of self is lost. When infants first enter the world they consist of, what can be labeled as, their real self. It doesn't take long for the real self to shrink and the conformed self to become dominant. Every time a child is called condescending names or is ridiculed for a project they have completed, part of their real self is lost and is replaced with their new conformed self. Many adults learned, at very young age, that conforming would allow for significant adults to like or even love them. Therefore, they learned to put aside their playful, real self and in many cases lost it completely. It

was that lost playful real self that causes the inability, in many individuals, to be free and playful.

A cause that was found to go hand in hand with the preceding reason was that parents did not allow themselves the time to play, because they didn't see the benefits. Life was both busy and hectic. It seemed there was never enough moments in the day for the important matters. Parents communicated that there were certain periods in life when the days were quite crowded. One such time was the period when families were growing, in wisdom, as well as, in age. The children demanded great amounts of quality time and careful attention. A mans career was at the point of growth, requiring daily, extra special effort. A woman's life continued to mature and grow in her experiences either in or out of the home. Even their social life took up a necessary part of time and energy. Friendships were being nurtured and there were many involvements in the community. In the midst of all of that, those interested in raising a healthy, happy family still had to keep in mind, that the most important task was the formation of a solid relationship with their children. Unfortunately, time spent in play was not seen as cost effective by parents so burdened with so many other responsibilities.

Some parents indicated that playful behavior would take away from their authority position in the family. That third cause of ineffective parent play skills left a family void of playful interaction. It allowed children to believe that play was not beneficial and in some households it was viewed as wrong. Parents who feared the loss of authority, also

feared the loss of respect. In many cases, parents did not recognize that respect would come through example, and that by treating children respectfully, they in turn would learn to respect as well. That fear of both loss of authority and of respect allowed parents to place very ridged boundaries for their children. Those boundaries, in most situations, were void of playful interactions.

Financial stress made it difficult for parents to spend time in play with their children. Dual income families were the norm in the population reported. For most families, the cost of living made it difficult to raise their children in the environment they chose. Many families did not exceed, or in some situations, even match, the economic life style of their parents, which in years past was the norm. The loss was experienced in, not only the time spent as a family, but, the quality of that interaction. Parents lost focus of the emotional needs of the children for fear that they would not fulfill their basic needs. Financial stress continued to have power over the functioning of these families until balance was achieved.

Relationship of the Problem to the Literature

The literature supports the fact that a problem exists in the area of family involvement through play. Research of this problem continues to reveal parent's ineffectiveness in demonstrating play skills to their children. Research further reveals that insufficient family playtime affects the healthy functioning of the family. "Insufficient family playtime was ranked in the top ten of family stresses today(Curran, 1987)." Children today are under more pressure to succeed than any other time in our

history. There are children suffering from ulcers and anxiety disorders today that would have been unheard of in generations past. Isenberg and Quisenberry (1988) suggest that children have "less time and opportunity to play than did children of previous generations" (p. 138). Furthermore, children have a right to play and as stated by Isenberg and Quisenberry (1988) that "right to play is challenged and must be defended by all adults, especially parents and educators"(p.138).

Being ranked as part of the top ten stresses effecting families today has given family playtime or the lack of, credibility. In a survey conducted by Dolores Curran, the lack of family playtime held its rank of most common stress factors in families, with worry of financial security, housing, work, marriage, and health problems.(1987) "Moderate levels of stress are normal, excessive stress can heighten family members' emotional discomfort and interpersonal conflict" (Schinke, Schilling II, Barth, Gilchrist, & Maxwell 1985, p.14). Mismanaged stress is one key factor in problem communication which results in a lack of healthy, playful quality time together. One family interviewed who was experiencing major life stress, which was external to the family members, recognized that their anxiety was being multiplied because their external stress was becoming internal conflict. The family, consisting of mother, father and three children ages eleven, nine and four uncovered the fact that through all the crises they lost focus on what was really important. The family was void of family play, they only discussed the essentials of the family dynamics, which they considered to be, food, housing and school . All

too often families suffering crises loose direction and become caught up in the problem.

Each individual is influenced by the functioning of the family system as a whole. " What is experienced by the child and shapes development is constructed conjointly with parents and emerges from the environment created by the family process " (Sroufe, 1991, p.21). Adolescents with a low sense of self more readily come from a family system which is unbalanced, meaning little or no family play interaction. Children, adolescents and even adults who lose their self- esteem eventually break down and become frozen in their ability to act. Nelson (1987) states "possessing self-esteem is a fundamental factor for developing and maintaining a healthy personality and functioning effectively in the world " (p.2).

Other factors adding to this state of low functioning adolescent development, are negative overall family tone, and anger, either passive or aggressive (Sroufe 1991). Some parenting styles lend themselves to negative input . Parents may believe that children become motivated through a recognition of their inadequacies, however, rather than motivate they deteriorate a child's self worth, which in turn adds to low functioning. One teenage boy dropped out of high school after years of hearing that "you will never make it in school". One young beautiful junior in high school very boldly proclaimed how ugly she was. When questioned about this notion, the "fact" was expressed that mother told me ever

since I was a baby. Both of these adolescents fell victim to a negative parenting style that left them with no self worth and very little motivation.

All to often, as mentioned prior, parents lack the knowledge of healthy play interaction. Most parents want only the best for their children. Most parents if given the choice would agree that a healthy family, both emotionally and physically is most important to them. However, parents are the major factor contributing to their children's problems and the problems created in the parent child relationship (Guerney, & Guerney Jr. 1989). Parents have a unique power in the lives of their children and in many cases lack the parenting knowledge, not, love and concern. Many parents know how to take care of their children's physical needs, however, emotional needs are not always as fortunate. The lack of parenting skills in the area of family play is becoming a growing problem. The problem allows both parent and child to make unwarranted negative assumptions (Guerney & Guerney, Jr. 1989). Negative assumptions, as, referred to prior, lead to unhealthy images of self which in turn cause conflict.

There is a definite link between conflict and unhealthy family interaction. Conflict in families creates an uneasy atmosphere and feeds the total self worth of the family. Family self esteem can be severely damaged if conflict is not resolved in a healthy manor. Children, all to often, witness parental conflict in ways that can be very destructive. Conflict may cause a lack of respect and may be handled in an unkind or discourteous manor. The chances for healthy playful family interaction at

this point are usually remote. Anger causes negative emotional reactions in children. Children then, react adversely to others, usually siblings, continuing to perpetuate an unhealthy interaction amongst family members (Brody, Stoneman, McCoy, & Forehand 1992). Furthermore, there are indications that the interaction of a distressed parent-teen relationship produces negative communication styles and a lack of functional problem solving behaviors (Foster, 1986). Parent-adolescent conflict has become a topic of research and although parents and teens report few conflicts and good communication, Montemayer (1983) estimated that "the incidence of serious parent-teen conflict may be as high as 15%-20%" (p.85). Furthermore, although parent-teen conflict, as stated by Foster, "is not a diagnostic category of the third edition of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM-III), it is frequently mentioned in association with other disorders, such as attention deficit disorder with hyperactivity and the conduct disorders" (p.253).

Finally, researchers state economics as a factor in the amount of parent-child play, with working class parents demonstrating less playtime (Levin, 1988) . " Social class differences have been found to influence parent-child play interactions" (Levine, 1988 p.170). Middle class mothers significantly partake more in joint participation in play with their children. However, middle class professional single mothers, fall into the same category as working class parents. Parents that learn and appreciate the benefits of family play can reverse the causes mentioned

on the previous pages. In fact, the outcomes surrounding parents demonstrating effective play skills can be life changing.

ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES AND EVALUATION INSTRUMENTS

Goals and Expectations

The following goals and expections were projected for this practicum. Parents who learn effective play skills, will more adequately demonstrate them to their children and will understand more fully the benefits of family play. Parents will come to know that family play strengthens the family bond and will not fear a loss of parental authority. There will also be a decrease in family stress as family play is increased.

Expected Outcomes

When parents are exposed to the literature supporting the facts on family play, it will allow them to more fully recognize the benefits. Through lectures and group sharing, as well as, hands on experience, parents will become more comfortable with playful interactions. The outcomes will be measured by the, increase in playfulness, question listed in the Parent Self-Report . There will be at lease a two point increase by the conclusion of the parenting program.

The more parents understand the benefits and learn age-appropriate play skills, the more relaxed they will become in their playful interactions with their spouse and children. The measurement tool used to record the degree of change, in the area of parental comfort, knowledge and understanding the benefits, is the Personal Report Rating Post Scale (see Appendix C). Parents will show an increase of two points or greater on questions one through four. Over- stressed parents will

come to realize by a two point increase, the benefits of play as a release of stress, which will be measured by the Personal Report Rating Scale (see Appendix C), question number five.

Measurement of Outcomes

The outcomes were accomplished by parent participation in a parenting program that educated them in becoming more effective in their play skills. The programs effectiveness was measured by a self report questionnaire, called a Parent Personal Report Rating Pre and Post Scale . The specific results were calculated by a pre and post rating scale distribution (see summary Appendix C). Each parent that entered this program increased by at least two points in all areas listed on The Parent Personal Report Rating Scale. Therefore, a parent rating of two on the pre rating scale increased to four or above on the post rating scale.

The specific mechanism used to record all events had a two part recording system. The first step was to briefly enter all activities into a daily log. The log was designed in columns and listed specific activities, brief comments about each activity and the results generated from each activity. The only unexpected results were the entry of six parents at week five of the program. In the case of the six latecomers the pre and post tests were not administered, therefore their results were not included in the data.

SOLUTIONS STRATEGY

Discussion and Evaluation of Solutions

Parents .in the population described, have demonstrated ineffective play skills to their children. Families today suffer from burnout. They continue to fall prey to all the pressures of society and become caught up in a web of confusion. Priorities, are such, that human relationships become less important and personal achievement scores highest on the list. One seventy-five year old man, speaking at a child advocacy conference, shared about his love of children and his desire to do what ever he could to give them a better world . He tried to do that, working diligently to establish community health care centers in his state, however, his priorities shifted in the process, his wife and children didn't know him. He realized to late that his work, no matter how important it was, left another group of children without a father. Wisdom can be gained by this nameless man and scores of others who have song that same song. One elderly person at a time near death shared with the nurses taking care of his needs, "take more time to love, to laugh, and to play with those who are important to you". The literature supports the

necessity of play and suggests many solution to the problems we see surrounding, a lack of it, today.

Families will be strengthened through an interaction that is playful. Levine (1988) suggests that the parent-child play relationship allows for an on going interaction. The dialogue between parent and child in play, not only affects their relationship, but also, the child's, emotional, cognitive, and social development. For example, as stated by Levine (1988):

> Parental involvement in mother-baby role play may communicate tolerance of the child's desire to master actively the passive indignation of being mothered. The child is allowed to mother the baby, who in Miller and Garvey's study (1984) was frequently represented by the mother herself! Furthermore, role-playing mother may foster internalization of self-nurturance and self-affection.(p.169)

Many theorist support and recognize the importance of parent-child play in the development of emotional and social maturity (Slade, 1987). It has been suggested by Schwartzmann(1979) that through role play children come to recognize the possibilities for challenge and change in the relationships that they have become familiar with. Schwartzmann further suggests that "parental involvement in role-play may function to communicate the parent's sense of the child as progressing toward increased, and eventually equivalent, competence and self-sufficiency"(p.170). Competence, is derived from feeling capable and

successful at mastering some task, parent-child role-play allows for this competence tobe nurtured. This same playful interaction gives children a feeling of significance, because it is at this time when children are personally recognized and accepted . Both, feeling competent and significant, are crucial areas when building a child's self-esteem. A child can be supported in his uniqueness through play interaction with parents, which again, adds to the building block of healthy self worth. Anthony, (1984) indicates that "it is through this universe of play that the child comes to differentiate himself from others because, while engaged in it, he is not only uniquely himself but is also uniquely considered by both parents"(p.28).

The benefits of play reach farther than the childhood years. Learning to play and recognizing play's worth allows adults the freedom of holding on to a youthful heart. Unfortunately, play doesn't just appear, when one reaches adulthood. Sutton-Smith (1979) indicate that "play develops out of the expressive interaction between a mother and her infant, such that the amount of playfulness in subsequent years is a direct function of the mother-infant involvement and elaborativeness"(p.166). It becomes clear that family play serves a greater purpose. If one doesn't learn how to play or that play is healthy and acceptable behavior that individual becomes one of the statistic adults unable to express themselves through play activities.

There is an attitude about play that sees its function as non-goal-oriented and so, becomes a behavior, children engage in as a rehearsal

for adulthood. This attitude can be crippling for society. One young man shared how depressed he had been for about a year and a half. In exploring the possibilities of this being a situational depression and not a major depressive disorder, we stumbled on the word adult. In his elaboration it became clear that he hated the fact that he was now, an adult, which meant, old and boring. "Adults don't play they just have responsibilities". Unfortunately that fact, in many cases can not be disputed. However, parents who recognize the importance of play interaction will pass down, to their children, valuable information.

The literature clearly represents the solution to the problem of parents demonstrating ineffective play skills and encourages and advises parents of its overall benefits. Levin (1988) suggests that parent-child play may be important to the growth of the parent-child relationship, as well as, other significant areas in child growth. For example, family play is influential in fostering flexibility of roles. Children, in play, have the opportunity to be any individual and play any role they would like to play. That feasibly allows a child to gain a sense of empathy for others and their experiences. Changing roles in play allows each family member to have a better understanding of one another's experience. Role flexibility, also allows the child to experience a reversal of authority and power. Levin (1988) also suggests, "In family play, subsystems can be momentarily redefined, roles exchanged and reorganized; what may be important here is the emergent sense of the possibility of change"(181).

The notion that families engaging in this type of play may not feel as constrained in meeting new demands was further expressed.

Through family creative play parents can teach children lessons of cause and effect. Creative role play would again, give children the chance to safely talk and walk through experiences that may not be experienced in their daily lives. Jessica age three and a half role played house with mom. In play she invited those individuals who were safe, into the home, and those who were less familiar or strangers, were asked to leave. This game allowed mom to affirm Jessica, while enjoying the play interaction together. This type of play also allows children to organize the families beliefs. They further understand the shared perception of the family in concepts such as, friendliness or hostility of people outside of the family.

When families play together they learn to understand one another in a new way. Family play helps the family to communicate both effectively and affectively. Levin (1988) suggests that "play also affords an important opportunity for the expression of affective meaning as well as the generation of positive affect" (p.181). She also recognizes that " for young children who are hardly a verbal match for adults or older siblings, family play is an opportunity for effective communication among all members"(p.181). Children are encouraged through playful interaction with family members. Adults have the opportunity to express themselves in a new and creative outlet.

Description of Selected Solution

The literature time and time again supported the fact that parents can be taught to playfully interact with each other and that through their playfulness they will be model to their children. This play modeling not only has an immediate effect but it also has a long-term impact. Adults parent themselves the way they were parented as children. Those adults that have seen playful behavior modeled by their parents, either consciously or unconsciously remember and repeat the same behavior. Ranieri(1981)supports this idea of parents being models for their children, he states; "The husband-wife relationship serves as a model relationship for the children, who learn through imitation. Theoretically, boys and girls should be able to look at their parents and say that is how to love another person"(p.8). Play between spouses will help them develop a deeper love and respect for one another. The parent's set the tone for the entire family, therefore, as they begin to interact in play the children will become more comfortable to do the same.

Parents, often need permission to try new ideas in a family setting. When they were taught that it is healthy to play they began to explore their options. Those parents that recognized and learned the benefits of couple and family play began to engage in it. Parents learned in a workshop setting, consisting of a format of small and large group interaction, that couple and family play has the ability to defuse potentially explosive situations. They also learned that being playful with one another promoted more objective thinking. Homes can become so

emotional. Families become anxious about many different aspects of their lives, however, when parents learned to put life in perspective, they recognized the humor in many of the experiences that surrounded their family life. Every family deals with stress today. Some stress initiated from within some outside the family unit. Parents realized that play helped them deal more effectively with stress. As quoted by Curran (1987):

> Playing together as a family sounds almost too simple, but it is a major factor in living with stress in the modern family . Many families spend a great deal of time together in child-related activities like league sports and scouting, but they don't play together as a family. I found that the families with the most ability to deal with everyday family tension are those who recognize the need to temper work and activities with shared play"(p.184).

It is this writers belief that parents want the best life for themselves and their children. Many parents today do not recognize that balance is an intricate part of experiencing the fullness of life. Family play is part of balanced parent-child interaction.

Research continually indicates that, in fact, parents do want the best for their children, however, they lack the knowledge and understanding to effectively carry out their desires. This writer has effectively succeeded, through education and experientials, to help parents increase their knowledge about this aspect of family life.

Family play is not a concept that most adults talk or read about . The workshop was designed so as to be non threatening. The setting allowed for a gradual appreciation and understanding of family play. This writer enlightened, through informative lectures, small group discussions, and literature handouts, parents to recognize their present play patterns and to gradually start to work towards change.

The program, was presented in a workshop form, it was monitored, as to the progress of the family, by self-report inventories and observations by the program coordinator. Another form of observation was through individual family meetings . These meetings gave the program coordinator an opportunity to discuss personal needs and overall goals, as well as, progress. Self reports gave the family the responsibility to recognize and share their growth.

Report of Action Taken

This writer is pleased to report that there were no deviations, roadblocks or difficulties encountered, as the program progressed. A few parents, when hearing of the programs success, started at week # five, however, their results were not calculated into the final summaries. The following is a weekly account of this parenting program.

1. **MONTH 1 - WEEK 1** - All of the candidates for this parenting program were met with or had telephone contact with the program coordinator. This allowed the coordinator to discuss the programs philosophy and answer any questions. Personal contact also allowed for

a family screening to eliminate those that might be looking for something not offered by the program. Screening families helped the program run smoother. One benefit that was clear when screening was the filtering out of parents that may have had another agenda. One mother wanted to change her teenage boys attitude towards doing household chores. When I explained the benefits of play, she again asked "but will his attitude change towards chores". This mother had a different agenda, and at that point I suggested some alternatives to her. All parents present were anxious to learn.

2. MONTH 1 - WEEK 2 - This week was a continuation of the first week, contacting those families that were not interviewed the week prior.

3. MONTH 1 - WEEK 3 - Week three began the workshop phase of the program. The parents completed a general questionnaire of family information (see Appendix D).

The workshop format was discussed and the first presentation on individual playfulness began. Parents explored personal issues surrounding their own playfulness and self-esteem. News print was used to outline and highlight important facts. The group broke into smaller sharing groups and discussed obstacles to play in their family of origin and today. The results of the discussions were shared in the large group. A large number of individuals present shared personal chilhood experiences that , they believed, to be the cause of a lack of playfulness as adults. One parent shared her families need to have her, at the age of ten, take over the responsibility of taking care of the younger children

while her mother returned to work outside of the home. She reminisced of the strain it placed on her and how she felt that at ten she had to become an adult. Some shared that their lack of playfulness was do to harsh discipline as a child. Most felt that the responsibility of becoming a parent took away their natural spontaneity.

The homework assigned for that meeting was to engage in a playful activity that week. Parents were asked to eliminate competitive activities.

4. MONTH 1 - WEEK 4 - Week fours presentation was designed to teach couple play and recognize that single parents need to play. The lecture for this week covered areas of balance, nurturing and laughter. small and large group sharing helped to foster cohesiveness.

When asked the question " when was the last time you played, as a couple" most recaped a date that coincided with a holiday, birthday or other special occasion, very few used play as a way to bring natural balance to their lives. One man indicated that he really didn't know what play was, and didn't realize that play and playfulness were for adults to partake in.The homework was to have fun together.

5.MONTH 2 - WEEK 1 - The presentation from the previous week was continued and the workshop format stayed the same as in prior weeks. The homework was to continue play as a couple.

Many couples shared how difficult it was for them to, not only, be playful with one another, but to find playful activities. All shared that through their discomfort that found joy in the experience.

6. MONTH 2 - WEEK 2 - The presentation was on specific family age- appropriate play, With Piaget's developmental stages used as a bases.

The parent's of younger children really enjoyed this segment of the workshop. Those with younger children, also, shared that it was easier for them to play with their toddlers than they felt it would be with older children or teens. The parents also recognized that play stages are different and that children enjoy and respond differently at different stages. One mother of an adolescent boy shared how receptive her son was to play, when it included playing with the family and their toddler on the floor with building blocks. Play for this young teen was safe if it were for the purpose of entertaining the baby, however it was a good starting point for this family.

The format again remained the same. The homework was to engage in play that would interest the children.

7. MONTH 2 - WEEK 3 - The presentation from the previous week was continued and the workshop format remained the same as in prior weeks. Homework, however, include instructions for the next four weeks.

A Family plan was to be developed. The plan consisted of parents working on their playful behavior, finding specific time each week that allowed them to be a couple and not mom and dad. Weekly family nights were planned. A family night was to be a playful activtiy that all could be a part of. The final goal of the plan was to provide a monthly family

meeting. At the family meeting, family business was discussed, future plans,chores, wants and needs.

8. MONTH 2 - WEEK 4 - The program coordinator met separately with the entire family unit. We spoke of specific family needs and desires.

The coordinator met with a family that had three distinct age separations. The siblings in this family ranged in age from sixteen to two. The two teenage boy's interests differed from that of the eleven year of sister and two year old baby girl. What was most interesting, in this family was their desire to make this plan work. The boys were willing to allow their sister to choose the family fun activity, as long as it had nothing to do with dance receitals and playing with her dolls, she agreed, with a stipulation, "no football". The family agreed to playing at home with the baby, but to also having time without the babies presence, at least until she was old enough to participate.

9. MONTH 3 - WEEK 1 - The program coordinator continued to meet with families not as yet seen. There was also contact by mail which consisted of, letters of encouragement and suggestions for activities. All the families in participation shared that the cooresponance was encouraging and helpful.

10.MONTH 3 - WEEK 2 AND WEEK 3 - Both weeks were a continuation of week nine. Some families that the coordinator met with were not as receptive to the idea of play, in fact, some older children and young adolescents,shared that they would be uncomfortable. The

coordinator had the opportunity, on a number of occasions, to encourage the skeptical youth and initiate an interest.

11. MONTH 3 - WEEK 4 - This week was a summation of the past three months, members had an opportunity to share in group and resources were provided. Parents shared their very funny anecdotes, about playful times that although uncomfortable proved beneficial. One couple shared how a potential explosive situation was defused because of playful responses. Laughter was a tool that many of the families enbraced and found effective at times of stress.

Family joy is a feeling that can not be duplicated. Families experiencing that joy have received an irreplaceable gift.

RESULTS, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Results

The parents indicated in this report were found to display ineffective play skills to their children. This writer chose to educate parents about family play, through a series of workshops, small and large group sharing, literature dissemination and personal interviews.

The outcomes projected for this population were achieved. When parents were exposed to the literature supporting the facts on family play, it allowed them to more fully recognize the benefits. The final summary (see appendix A) clearly indicates an increase of the predicted two points or higher, in all areas of awareness. Parents knowledge of family play increased at least three points in some instances a six point increase was indicated. Their comfort level, recognizing the benefits, looking forward to leisure playtime, and seeing play as a stress reducer increased the predicted two points, however in most cases there was a more substantial increase. All parents recorded at least a two point increase in their recognition of family closness because of play.

The results further express the desire of family enjoyment and cohesiveness. The results also, clearly, indicated the true lack of understanding, not lack of interest, to learn about the importance of family play. Parents today need to know that there is a way to both enjoy their children, reduce stress, and foster healthy family interaction.

Discussion

The parents indicated in this report all expressed, through personal interviews and the measurement tools that their understanding and appreciation of family play had greatly increased.

This writer had the opportunity to witness the increase of playful interaction, among the parents, as they progressed through the process. As indicated on the Personal Report Rating Scale (see Appendix A), one individual indicated all zeros on his pre test with a substantial increase of from five to ten in all areas on his post test. Most of the other participants indicated a greater than two point increase in many of the areas reported.

Interviews with the families and observation of family interaction indicated an increase in comfort with family play, as well as, an ability to relax and enjoy the leisure playtime together. The children were seemingly more comfortable with parental play after their parents attendence to the workshop, as compared to, prior to the workshop. The writer also believes that an increase in comfort level was obtained through the increase of knowledge about age appropriate and creative play activities. The parents also indicated an increase in spontananity in their playfulness.

The positive results of the program indicate, to the writer, a greater need for both education in the area of family play. It became clear as the program was progressing that in just twelve short weeks the esteem of the family was positively changing. What would be the results had this program been long term? The outcome of this program affirmed the

writers belief that parents want the best for their children and each other and if given the correct information and guidance, families can increase their potential to interact playfully, which, in turn, will increase the family sense of self worth.

This writer, when presenting the program again, would increase the time spent on individual issues dealing with play. There seemed to be childhood issues that needed more resolution, those issues may effect the longterm progress of the participants. It is also believed by the writer that spending time together with individual family situations is most effective. More than one coordinator could have been helpful when personally observing and sharing with the individual families.

It is the writer's belief that parents want the best for their children and each other and if given the correct information and guidance, families can increase their potential to interact playfully, which, in turn, will increase the family sense of self worth.

Recommendations

This writer recommends that this program become part of a comprehensive parenting program. The stages of age appropriate play would be separated into three categories, primary,middle, and high school. Programs would be required for entrance into each level of school and times made available for day or evening attendance.

Dissemination

The plans for disseminating the results and to present future workshops has begun with networking through the mental health association, which will allow access to the public schools and various churches in the area that are interested in parent education. Flyers, telephone contact and personal referrals are the main sources of publicity at present.

Those colleagues that have examined the results are pleased, supportive and willing to be a part of any further workshop presentations.

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APPENDIX A

PERSONAL REPORT PLAY-SKILL QUESTIONNAIRE

Personal Report Play-Skill Questionnaire
Summary

1. Do you personally find time to play? Yes 2 No 17

2. When was the last time the family played together?
   - 5 parents left this question blank
   - 6 parents wrote that their last vacation was their last time.
   - 5 Labor Day
   - 3 last year

3. What stops you from engaging in family play?
   - 14 parents shared, that time was the reason for no play.
   - 4 reported being tired.
   - 1 fear and pride.

4. On a scale of 1 to 10, 10 being the highest rating, how would you rate the importance of play in the family?
   - 5 parents rated this question 10
   - 4 " " " " 8
   - 3 " " " " 7
   - 3 " " " " 6
   - 2 " " " " 5
   - 2 " " " " 4

* All total 19 parents were present at this workshop.

APPENDIX B

OBSERVATIONAL CHECKLIST

Observational Checklist
Summary

ON A SCALE OF 1 TO 10, 10 BEING THE HIGHEST, RATE THE FAMILY PLAY INTERACTION. (completed by the program coordinator)

( ) = # of Families reported
_ = rating given by observer

Family seemed uneasy with family play. (8) 10 (1) 8 (1) 4

Parents unable to relax. (8) 10 (1) 9 (1) 6

Parents unable to give up parental role in play. (7) 8 (3) 6

Children seemingly uncomfortable with parental play interaction (6) 7 (3) 5 (1) 4

Parents seem to have problems with creative play activities. (8) 8 (2) 5

Parents share a lack of knowledge in age appropriate play. (9) 8 (1) 4

Parents seem uncomfortable with spontaneous play. (9) 8 (1) 5

APPENDIX C

PERSONAL REPORT RATING SCALE

Personal Report Rating Scale
Pre/Post Test
Summary

TO BE FILLED OUT BY PARENTS:
ON A SCALE OF 1-10, 10 BEING THE HIGHEST, PLEASE RATE THE FOLLOWING STATEMENTS.

	Parent	Pre	Post
My knowledge of family play is presently.	1	3	8
	2	2	8
	3	2	7
	4	5	10
	5	4	10
	6	0	10
	7	8	10
	8	6	8
	9	4	8
	10	3	8
	11	2	10
	12	2	10
	13	6	9
	14	7	10
	15	3	10
	16	5	8
	17	5	8
	18	7	9
	19	6	10
My comfort level with family play is.	Duplicate of responses to question #1 except for:		
	13	4	8
	18	6	10
The benefits of family play for me are.	1	3	10
	2	2	10
	3	3	9
	4	5	10
	5	4	10

Parent	Pre	Post
6	0	10
7	7	10
8	7	9
9	3	8
10	4	10
11	2	9
12	3	9
13	6	9
14	6	10
15	4	10
16	5	10
17	5	9
18	6	9
19	7	10

I look forward to leisure playtime as a family.

All parents rated this question pre between 5 and 7, except for parent # 6, who rated it 0, all post tests 10.

I find play to be a stress reducer.

The scores fell again between 5 and 7,#6 rating 0, all post tests 10.

Play brings my family closer together.

All parents reported at least a five point increase.

APPENDIX D

PLAY-QUESTIONAIRE

Play-Questionaire

NAME:

ADDRESS:

PHONE #:

Number and ages of children in the household:

Number of adults in the household:

My reason for taking this workshop:

At present does the family engage in family playtime?

What specific activities do you enjoy together ?

Do your children view you as playful ?

Do you feel secure in your knowledge of play ?

What stops you from being playful ?

What were the family play rules in your family of origin ?

In your opinion does family play interaction secure a healthier parent-child relationship? Why?

Additional comments or questions:

ALL INFORMATION IS CONFIDENTIAL